

MV NISHA – A BRIEF SYNOPSIS



Some members of M Squadron of the UK's Special Boat Service with "proof of interception" of MV Nisha on 21 December 2001

After the 9/11 Attacks, it was rumoured that Osama bin Laden hatched a plot to create a tsunami on the River Thames at high tide on Xmas Eve 2001 by blowing up the Thames Barrier with 26,000 tons of high explosive on board one of two ships named **MV Nisha**. The use of ships with the same name was intended to sow confusion and help impede any investigations as to where the real and/or decoy MV Nisha were at any given time.

The much debated MV Nisha plot was alleged to be one of two major terrorist plots intended to quickly follow the 9/11 Attacks. Both were hatched by Osama bin Laden and both were thwarted by anti-terrorism authorities in the United Kingdom and the United States. The other plot is believed to have related to the blowing up a nuclear power station, possibly at Indian Point in New York, but the plot never materialised to the same degree as the MV Nisha plot apparently did.

Had the MV Nisha plot been successful, hundreds of thousands of people would have been killed or injured. It is estimated that the River Thames would have flooded much of London and that the waters would not have subsided for up to three weeks. As explained below, rumour had it that one ship was intercepted by the Special Boat Service and scuttled along with its crew and 26,000 tons of sugar on board that had been converted into high explosives with the equivalent power of one of the Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The other ship was permitted to sail to London.

Given the conflicting accounts of what transpired, precisely what happened remains a mystery, but it is believed there were two ships named MV Nisha, one of which was used as a decoy. However, in the interests of national security the UK Government issued a DA-Notice concerning anything to do with MV Nisha to prevent disclosure by the press of what was actually happening. Whether or not a DA-Notice was issued or issued and then withdrawn is debatable. Furthermore, the records of Cargo Law relating to two ships named MV Nisha may have been deleted and FaireSansDire's investigations, activities and findings are not even alluded to in any press reports.

Accordingly, there were several conflicting press statements and many loose ends as noted by The Independent in particular. On closer inspection of the two articles published by The Independent, it appears that they had information that there were (at least) two ships called MV Nisha but that they were prevented from releasing that information for reasons of national security. The Independent states:

(1) Even if nothing is found, it still leaves the possibility that an unidentified boat filled with explosives may be sailing now.

(2) We need to be assured that there isn't any other vessel which has got through the net.

How the UK authorities found out about the MV Nisha plot and, more pertinently, what precisely happened in the days before Xmas Eve 2001 will always be shrouded in secrecy given the potential damage to London's economy and status were the government to have confirmed the extent to which London was vulnerable from such an attack. However, as regards identifying the threat, according to Faire Sans Dire's Chairman Bill Fairclough, while attending a meeting in Autumn 2001, an offshore financial services company tried to hire him: he turned down the offer and investigated the company instead. Coincidentally, the meeting was held in Barclays' main boardroom, roughly 18 months after Bill Fairclough had left Barclays.

The information Faire Sans Dire obtained from its investigations and passed on to the appropriate authorities indicated that some of the proceeds from the Barlow Clowes frauds may have been stolen and used to fund terrorism. It was discovered that the twice misappropriated funds were used to create and maintain a phantom fleet of an estimated 20 vessels owned indirectly by Osama bin Laden which included at least one ship named MV Nisha.

Doubtless there would have been many other sources of information about the phantom fleet as there is no doubt that the fleet existed. It is what happened on the days before Xmas Eve 2001 that will probably remain a known unknown for decades so far as the public is concerned. According to Sudhir Mulji, chairman of The Great Eastern Shipping Company, all

the owners of the genuine MV Nisha wanted after the event was compensation for the delays caused by the UK Government.

So, if you have the sheer gall to seriously believe you think you know what really happened and did not happen in relation to the MV Nisha incident, do contact us. We reckon only a handful of people knew the full picture and we know or can make informed guesses as to who they are. Maybe the lesson to be learnt is that the press in a hurry are at best as good as the sources they choose to rely on and the Cabinet Office, MI5, MI6 and the Special Forces are not reliable sources when it comes to real or perceived threats to the UK's national security. Set out below is the text of a contemporaneous account [sic] of the interception of MV Nisha on 21 December 2001 taken from the website Elite UK Forces.

"Dateline: 5:30am Friday, 21 December 2001

With global tensions high following the September 11th attacks and the war in Afghanistan, UK intelligence services became concerned over a cargo ship approaching the English coast. A tip off was received that the ship, the MV Nisha, may be carrying 'terrorist material' along with its stated cargo of sugar. This combined with the fact that the freighter's route from Mauritius was preceded by a stop at Djibouti, close to suspected Al-Qaeda havens of Somalia and Yemen, caused an unprecedented security operation to be launched.

A task force consisting of SBS and SAS operators, bomb disposal experts and anti-terrorist police officers was assembled at RNAS Yeovilton in Somerset. A detailed plan was drawn up to deal with the threat from the MV Nisha. Not long after first light, the plan was put into operation. At 5:30am, The Royal Navy Type 23 Frigate, HMS Sutherland, intercepted the MV Nisha off the Sussex coast, launching SBS/SAS teams in rigid-inflatable boats (RIBs), which headed across the choppy seas towards the 500ft vessel.

Above them, an armada of helicopters swarmed around the cargo ship. Lynx Mk8 helicopters, carrying SBS/SAS snipers provided cover as 2 Chinooks from RAF 7 Squadron manoeuvred into position above the ships' superstructure. First one, then the other Chinook disgorged its cargo of black-clad SBS/SAS operators. Using well-practiced maritime counter terrorism techniques, the assault teams fast-roped down onto the MV Nisha, swiftly securing the bridge and radio room, whilst their colleagues in the RIBs scaled the ship's sides and took control of the rest of the vessel.

The crew were taken completely by surprise and did not resist. With the initial threat dealt with, Seaking helicopters brought in anti-terrorist police and bomb disposal officers. They performed an initial sweep of the MV Nisha but found nothing. Once the ship was fully secured it was brought into port, where customs and anti-terrorism officers were able to perform an inch by inch search of the freighter. While nothing suspicious was found, the operation was seen by many as an indicator of the UK's vigilance and willingness to respond to potential terrorist events. It was also a rare glimpse of the SBS at work."

Citations

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Cited 07 - the first of two articles from the Guardian about Osama bin Laden's phantom fleet.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/dec/23/september11.terrorism1>

Cited 08 - the second of two articles from the Guardian about Osama Bin Laden's phantom fleet.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/dec/23/september11.terrorism2>

Cited 09 - a contemporaneous article in the Irish Times about the owners seeking compensation.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/terror-search-of-ship-may-take-weeks-britain-says-1.408327>

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